

Winnipeg River Watershed District Formation Proposal

to include the

Rural Municipality of Alexander

Town of Lac du Bonnet

Rural Municipality of Piney

Town of Powerview-Pine Falls

Rural Municipality of Reynolds

Rural Municipality of Whitemouth

Watershed Planning and Programs

Environment and Climate Change

2025

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Manitoba's Watershed Districts Program

Manitoba's Watershed Districts Program is a voluntary provincial-municipal partnership program that promotes and enhances watershed health and resiliency through land and water stewardship programs and partnerships. With funding from the Manitoba government and included municipalities, locally appointed watershed district boards make planning and management decisions to improve watershed health across most of municipal Manitoba.

Environment and Climate Change will provide additional funding in the form of an annual grant for the formation of a new watershed district to include municipalities that are not currently members of the Watershed Districts Program and to expand into new areas of participating municipalities. The Watershed Districts Act outlines the process for forming a watershed district.

The Watershed Planning and Programs Section of Water Science and Watershed Management Branch administers the Watershed Districts Program, providing assistance to the board and staff in program planning and delivery and fiscal management. Watershed Planning and Programs also coordinates and supports integrated watershed management planning as outlined in the Water Protection Act.

Request for Formation of the Winnipeg River Watershed District

The Watershed Districts Act outlines the process for forming a watershed district. A council of a municipality may initiate an expansion or formation process by providing a resolution to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change. Based on expressed interest in the Watershed Districts Program from municipalities in eastern Manitoba, Watershed Planning and Programs initiated the formation process and municipal governments in the region were invited to an information session held September 2024. The intent of this meeting was to provide general information related to the watershed district formation process and gauge interest prior to initiating a formation proposal. Resolutions of participation were received from interested municipalities and the formation proposal was created. This formation proposal outlines details of the potential formation of the Winnipeg River Watershed District to include the Town of Powerview-Pine Falls, Town of Lac du Bonnet, Rural Municipality of Reynolds, Rural Municipality of Whitemouth, Rural Municipality of Piney and Rural Municipality of Alexander.

Municipal councils are asked to review this proposal and each municipality must provide a copy of its decision to the Minister, either approving or rejecting the formation proposal. A sample resolution is included in Appendix A.

Any questions regarding this proposal should be addressed to Madeline Dessler, Senior Watershed Planner at Madeline.Dessler@gov.mb.ca or Lacy Kontzie, A/Manager, Watershed Planning and Programs at Lacy.Kontzie@gov.mb.ca.

We kindly ask that municipalities submit resolutions by October 31, 2025. Please send resolutions to Madeline.Dessler@gov.mb.ca.

The Winnipeg River Watershed District

Mandate

Watershed districts have a mandate to sustain healthy watersheds through land and water stewardship programs and partnerships. A watershed district board is responsible for planning and management decisions to improve watershed health.

Under the authority of The Water Protection Act, watershed districts play a lead role in the development and implementation of integrated watershed management plans in Manitoba. Watershed management plans provide a decision-making framework for the protection, restoration and management of water, aquatic ecosystems and drinking water sources. The formation of the Winnipeg River Watershed District would include the future development of integrated watershed management plans.

The following are excluded from the jurisdiction, authority and control of the future Winnipeg River Watershed District Board:

- municipal and provincial drainage works, including bridges and crossings
- provincial dams, reservoirs and flood protection works
- provincial Crown land (including wildlife management areas, provincial parks, provincial forests, and community pastures)
- national parks and other federal lands
- Indian Reserves as defined in The Indian Act (Canada)

Despite these exclusions, the Watershed Districts Act enables the board of a watershed district to enter into agreements with others such as Indigenous communities, community pastures, or provincial or national parks to support actions within integrated watershed management plans.

Boundaries and District Scope

Water does not follow administrative boundaries. A watershed district encourages and promotes cooperation and communication among everyone in the watershed with the objective of improving watershed health. Commonly, watershed boundaries include portions of multiple jurisdictions and do not align with administrative boundaries. Effective and sustainable watershed management requires cooperation, coordination and partnership among all jurisdictions within a watershed.

Land and water stewardship programs offered by watershed districts focus on reducing the impacts of flood and drought, conserving and enhancing wildlife habitat, reducing nutrients in waterways, improving water quality, protecting drinking water and increasing watershed awareness through education.

Municipal Partners

With support from municipal councils, the Winnipeg River Watershed District at the time of formation would include:

- Rural Municipality of Alexander
- Town of Lac du Bonnet
- Rural Municipality of Piney
- Town of Powerview-Pine Falls
- Rural Municipality of Reynolds
- Rural Municipality of Whitemouth

Integrated Watershed Management Planning

Under Manitoba's watershed-based approach to planning, watershed districts are designated as water planning authorities to lead planning efforts. Watershed management plans guide the work of watershed districts and their partners by helping to prioritize and target projects and programs to improve watershed health, targeting activities and programs to areas in need of greater protection, setting a baseline for measuring the success of management efforts and reducing future costs by identifying actions that will prevent future problems.

An integrated watershed management plan identifies priority land and water-related issues in a watershed, determines projects or policies targeted to address the issues, and identifies how land and water management programming will be cooperatively carried out in a watershed.

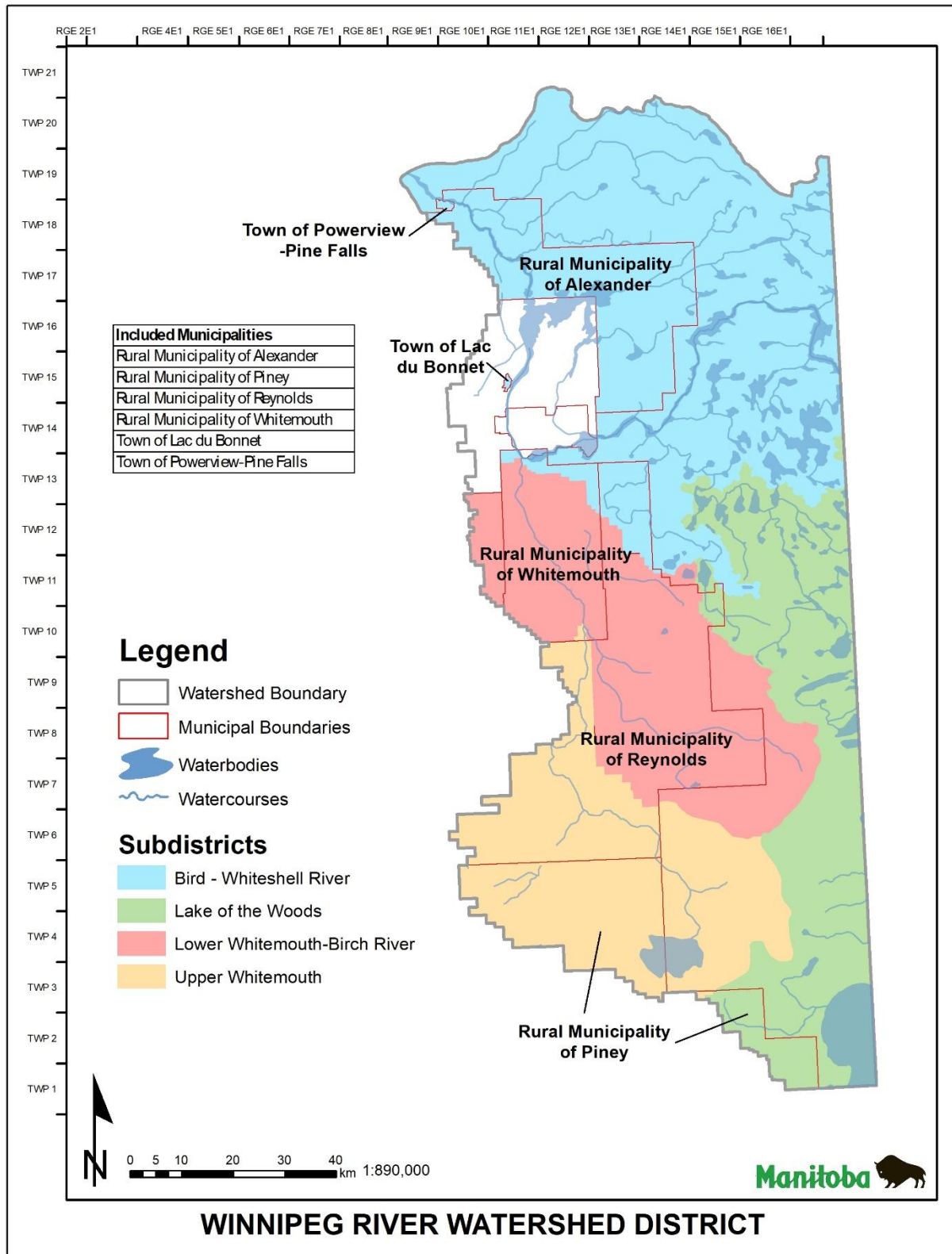


Figure 1: Winnipeg River Watershed District draft regulation map.

Board Composition

The board of the Winnipeg River Watershed District is responsible for the overall governance of the district, program development and financial accountability. The board employs staff to deliver district programming based on conservation requirements and recommendations from subdistricts, and that align with priorities set forth in approved integrated watershed management plans, once developed. The board is composed of the chair from each subdistrict committee, chair of the board, and one member appointed by the Minister, also known as the provincial appointee.

The Watershed Districts Act defines the composition of the board of a watershed district. The board of the Winnipeg River Watershed District would consist of the following:

- Chair of the Winnipeg River Watershed District
- Chair of Bird–Whiteshell River subdistrict
- Chair of Lake of the Woods subdistrict
- Chair of Lower Whitemouth–Birch River subdistrict
- Chair of Upper Whitemouth River subdistrict
- Provincial Appointee
- Up to two additional members as appointed by the Board

Subdistrict Composition

Included municipalities appoint ratepayers to subcommittees (subdistricts) that are responsible to the board to make recommendations on local programming that would benefit both the subdistrict and watershed. Subdistrict boundaries are delineated based on subwatershed boundaries and are defined in the Watershed Districts Regulation. Member municipalities appoint representatives to each subdistrict based on the municipal land area within each subdistrict. Subdistrict members promote and encourage participation in watershed district programming and act as a liaison between the council of their municipality and the board.

The Winnipeg River Watershed District subdistrict appointments by municipality are defined in Table 1.

Table 1: Winnipeg River Watershed District subdistrict appointments by municipality.

	Bird-Whiteshell River	Lake of the Woods	Lower Whitemouth - Birch River	Upper Whitemouth River	Total Municipal Appointments
Town of Powerview-Pine Falls	1				1
Town of Lac du Bonnet	1				1
Rural Municipality of Reynolds	2	1	2	2	7
Rural Municipality of Whitemouth	2		2		4
Rural Municipality of Piney		2		2	4
Rural Municipality of Alexander	2				2
Total Subdistrict members	8	3	4	4	19

Responsibilities of the Board

The Watershed Districts Act identifies each watershed district board as a corporate body and allows it to:

- enter into contracts and agreements
- hire staff
- acquire lands by purchase or lease
- assume responsibility for works
- recommend protected areas to municipalities
- develop and implement an integrated watershed management plan

Benefits and Opportunities

The Watershed Districts Program provides many benefits and opportunities for included municipalities. In particular, the program:

- provides a framework to allow local people to collaborate, set priorities and respond to local issues and needs

- establishes the framework to develop watershed management education and extension programming that operates locally
- provides an opportunity to develop an integrated watershed management plan to address locally identified issues and provincial priorities
- increases opportunities and the success rate of acquiring external funding
- establishes a watershed-based organization with the potential to combine a diversity of resources, local and technical knowledge, and experience

Financial Considerations

Core Funding

Watershed districts receive core funding from the Manitoba government and their included municipalities for district operations and programming. For every three dollars Manitoba contributes to a watershed district, the district must collect a minimum of one dollar collectively from its included municipalities. Districts may also collect additional funding from included municipalities beyond the minimum required 3:1 funding ratio to support additional watershed programming. Additional funding is obtained from a variety of sources, including environmental organizations, industry, and government programs.

Borrowing Authority

The borrowing authority proposed for the Winnipeg River Watershed District is \$80,000 and would be defined in the Watershed Districts Regulation. A watershed district board may borrow money for purposes of its operation subject to the limits set out in the Watershed Districts Regulation.

Calculating Municipal Contributions

The Watershed Districts Act authorizes watershed districts to collect levies from each included municipality for the purposes of operational expenses. Levy contributions by each included municipality are calculated by using the following method:

- Prescribed percentage (apportionment) where agreed-upon percentages are applied to each municipality through the district's schedule under the Watershed Districts Regulation. The percentage indicates the proportion of total levies required by each municipality. Apportionment may be based on a number of factors, including land assessment, population or other factors agreed upon by all municipalities within a district.

These percentages will be set in regulation and account for each municipal partner's portion of the total municipal levy set by the board. Percent contributions will not change over time; however, the total municipal levy requested by the watershed district may change.

Table 2 is based on participation by all municipalities receiving this formation proposal. Percentages are subject to change in the regulation based on which municipalities support the proposal.

Table 2: Winnipeg River Watershed District Proposed Levies by Municipality.

Municipality	Proposed Levy Scenario - \$175,000 Provincial Grant	Percentage
Rural Municipality of Alexander	\$16,333	28%
Town of Lac du Bonnet	\$2,333	4%
Rural Municipality of Piney	\$6,417	11%
Town of Powerview-Pine Falls	\$2,333	4%
Rural Municipality of Reynolds	\$15,750	27%
Rural Municipality of Whitemouth	\$15,167	26%
Total	\$58,333	100.0%

*Estimated levies are based on full municipal participation. Levy amounts are subject to change in the regulation based on which municipalities support the proposal. Levy amounts will be adjusted according to municipal support.

Municipal levies for the Winnipeg River Watershed District were calculated using a number of factors. A municipality's area within the watershed district was taken into consideration, alongside rateable land assessment, crown land percentage, and the extent of programming opportunities.

Winnipeg River Watershed District Formation Process

Upon review and approval of the final formation proposal, all municipalities listed are required to provide Watershed Planning and Programs with a municipal resolution of approval. Once the Minister of Environment and Climate Change reviews and approves the formation proposal, Watershed Planning and Programs will complete all work related to formalizing the watershed district, such as granting provincial funding and making amendments to the Watershed Districts Regulation. Municipalities must pass a resolution authorizing council participation in the Winnipeg River Watershed District, in accordance with The Watershed Districts Act and Regulation.

Once council participation is authorized, all participating municipalities will contribute levies to the Winnipeg River Watershed District and appoint representatives to subdistrict committees in accordance with The Watershed Districts Act and Regulation. Watershed Planning and Programs will assist in forming the subdistrict committees and holding elections to elect a chair for each subdistrict committee. Further support will be provided to form the Winnipeg River Watershed District Board and to review roles and responsibilities of the board, ensure board governance practices are understood and establish board policies. The Winnipeg River Watershed District will be responsible for acquiring office space, hiring staff and developing watershed programming in accordance with the Watershed Districts Program Policy and Procedures Manual and the overall Watershed Districts Program mandate. A summary of the formation process can be found in Appendix B.

Appendix A: Sample Resolution

WHEREAS Manitoba has prepared a formation proposal for the Winnipeg River Watershed District that supports watershed-based management in Manitoba and outlines the details of municipal participation in the Winnipeg River Watershed District;

AND WHEREAS the (Name of Municipality) has met with Manitoba regarding the formation proposal for the Winnipeg River Watershed District;

AND WHEREAS council of the (Name of Municipality) understands that the amendment to the Watershed Districts Regulation will include the final details of participation in the Winnipeg River Watershed District;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED the (Name of Municipality) supports the formation of the Winnipeg River Watershed District and the (Name of Municipality)'s participation in the Watershed Districts Program.

Appendix B: Watershed Districts Program Formation Process

The formation process to establish a new watershed district is as follows:

1. Information Exchange

Municipality, watershed district, and/or Manitoba - Watershed Planning and Programs Section discuss potential participation in the program through information exchange and dialogue.

2. Municipal Request for a Formation Proposal

The municipal council forwards a resolution to Watershed Planning and Programs, showing intent to participate in the Watershed Districts Program and requesting the preparation of a formation proposal.

3. Formation Proposal is drafted by Watershed Planning and Programs

Based on availability of Provincial funds for additional expansion to the program, Watershed Planning and Programs develops a draft formation proposal, outlining the proposed financial structure, governance, programming and other relevant details of participation in the program.

4. Final Formation Proposal

Watershed Planning and Programs edits and finalizes the formation proposal and shares with all municipalities listed in the proposal.

5. Municipal Resolutions of Approval

Upon review and approval of the final formation proposal, all municipalities listed in the proposal are required to provide Watershed Planning and Programs with a municipal resolution of approval. Municipalities must submit the resolution within 60 days of receiving the proposal, as outlined in section 7(4) of The Watershed Districts Act.

6. Provincial Approval through Regulation

Upon Minister approval, Watershed Planning and Programs will complete all work related to formalizing the watershed district formation, such as requesting new provincial funding and making amendments to the Watershed Districts Regulation, and will contact all municipal partners when the formation is formalized.

7. Municipal Resolution

The municipality passes a resolution authorizing council participation in the new watershed district, in accordance with The Watershed Districts Act and Regulation.

8. Levies and Appointments

The participating municipalities contribute levies to the new watershed district and appoint representatives to subdistrict committees in accordance with The Watershed Districts Act and Regulation.